

# GROWTH DRIVES HEALTH INSURANCE ASSOCIATION TO BUILD BETTER LEADERS

Zenger Folkman's Extraordinary Leader™ and Extraordinary Coach™ development experiences guide this Health Insurance division to more effective leadership.

## THE CHALLENGE

With growth comes a need for better leaders. That was the situation facing the information systems division of this health insurance association. The division handles back-office processing not only in its home state but also contracts to do processing for plans in other states, as well as insurance plans for federal and state government employees, the military, and commercial businesses.

That's why executives of the 2,000-employee division and their training and development team had established a summer institute for management development. The program was successful, but the development team noticed that as the organization grew, the program began to tilt toward leadership development.

"As we looked at the differences between management and leadership, we realized that we needed to make a distinction between the two," said the manager of information system capability programs. "We need individuals to understand leadership in its totality and that it is not just one component."

Their team decided that leadership development was crucial in the organization, and they needed to break it out separately from their existing summer institute program.

They were in part motivated by management demographics indicating that the next five years might see many retirements. "Are we prepared from a succession planning standpoint, from a replacement standpoint, and are we really getting people in the pipeline that will be in a position to assume those responsibilities?" the team asked themselves.

To develop the leaders to handle their changing business environment and to replace those who might move on, the team began a search for a partner to help them develop and deliver a new leadership-focused training element.

## THE SOLUTION

The health insurance association was most impressed with Zenger Folkman. They cite Zenger Folkman's reputation in the industry, experience with similar programs at other companies, and the research behind their development experiences as reasons they gave Zenger Folkman further consideration.

"We were also very excited about the 360-degree feedback component and the organization's approach to not only

## AT A GLANCE

### The Challenge

- This health insurance association's information systems division was experiencing recent growth that spurred a need for more leadership development.
- Management demographics indicated likely leadership turnover in the coming years.

### The Solution

- They selected Zenger Folkman to help them build a leadership training program—the result includes *The Extraordinary Leader™* and *The Extraordinary Coach™* development experience.

### The Results

- After two years of implementation, the number of coaching conversations held has significantly increased, and leaders are achieving greater success.

delivering the results of the feedback but the methodology by which they would teach our people to analyze those results and use them in their development plans," the program manager said.

Because of the quantitative, analytical nature of the senior leaders of the information systems division, the research behind Zenger Folkman's program made an important impression.

Zenger Folkman facilitators were willing to say, "let me show you the hard data and the hard numbers that support my methodology and my approach," she said. "That goes a long way with our CIO and his direct reports."

They selected Zenger Folkman to help develop an effective leadership development experience, which is now held each summer. It is targeted at a pool of about 100 total individuals viewed as thought leaders within the division, and it is centered around Zenger Folkman's *Extraordinary Leader* approach.

## THE RESULTS

“The reactions to the experience overall have been positive,” said the program manager. “Everyone walks away with a deeper understanding of who they are, first and foremost, and also a better understanding of how to approach leadership within the organization.”

The Zenger Folkman methodology includes an innovative approach to delivering and interpreting 360-degree feedback, which can be difficult for some participants. Their first reaction upon seeing the results is often shock.

“But Zenger Folkman does an excellent job of helping them to become comfortable with the results and cautioning them about the common trap of looking at the weakest scores and starting there,” she said, referring to Zenger Folkman’s emphasis on building strengths rather than fixing weaknesses.

She explained that before long, participants opened up and revealed that they didn’t realize they struggled in one area and didn’t appreciate that they were strong in another.

The workshops have benefitted even those who don’t have direct reports, the program manager said. Because of the nature of their work, design architects may not have staff, but they do influence and have approval authority over many projects within the organization. They now better understand their role as leaders, specifically how they can coach and mentor.

“We are starting to see people form those informal networks and bonds that we hoped we would,” the program manager said. The first cohort took it upon themselves to continue to

meet regularly to gauge their progress and encourage each other to follow what they’d learned in the workshops. One top executive, who self-proclaimed that he is “not a people-person,” has begun his own personal mentoring program for individuals in his area.

Zenger Folkman has delivered on the three points most important to the program manager and her team. When considering partners for leadership development, she said: “They get strong points first for their knowledge of the industry. We are looking for the best and the brightest within the industry. Then we are looking for people willing to customize to our environment. And third, once you get here in front of our people, do you have the engaging personality that makes them want to learn more about the material? To have that trifecta means a lot to me as a program manager.”

“The relationship has been wonderful,” she said. “It’s important to us that any training program match our organization’s feel and flavor. Zenger Folkman has done a good job at that.”

As their organization development team considers the coming turnover among leadership ranks, they feel confident they are on track and prepared. They look forward to conducting further 360-degree feedback with the development experience “graduates” to measure improvement and highlight areas for continued emphasis.

“I look at the other training organizations that we were considering, and I don’t think anybody would have done a better job,” she said. “I am very excited about what we are doing with Zenger Folkman.”

## GROUNDING IN RESEARCH. BUILT ON STRENGTHS.

Zenger Folkman’s approach makes more of people development, transforming the process into a new, strengths-focused lifestyle that brings science to the art of leadership.